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Issattha¹ Sutta

The Discourse on Archery | S 3.24

Theme: Where giving brings great fruit (detailed)

Translated & annotated by Piya Tan ©2014

1 Sutta background

1.1 The Aṅguttara commentary (SA 1:164) recounts how when the Buddha begins his ministry, “when he first awakened” (*paṭhama, bodhiyā*), both he and his monastic community win great gains and honours. On account of this, the popularity of the other sectarians begins to wane. The rival teachers, of course, are not happy with this, and often try to smear their reputation.

As part of their plan to discredit the Buddha and his community, the rival teachers spread the rumour that he proclaims that gifts should only be given to him and his monastics, not to other teachers and their disciples. Not only is this allegation untrue, it is also malicious, since it is aimed at accusing them of being selfish.

1.2 When king (Pasenadi) hears of this, he at once knows that this must be their plan to malign the Buddha and his community. So he orders that the people gather on a festival day for a public dialogue so that the Buddha can properly vindicate himself. Among this large congregation are the rival teachers themselves, self-consciously “scratching the ground with their feet.”

When everyone has assembled, the king then addresses the Buddha, and this dialogue is recorded in this Sutta. What is interesting here is what begins as the king trying to question the Buddha publicly, turns out in the end to be that it is the Buddha who counter-questions the king, and so turning it into a Dharma instruction. (SA 1:164)

2 Sutta highlights

2.1 The Sutta highlight is when the king asks the Buddha the key question followed by the Buddha’s answer:

“**Where, bhante, should one give gifts?**” (*Kattha nu kho bhante dānaṃ dātabban’ti.*)

“Maharajah, wherever the heart has faith.” (*Yattha kho mahārāja cittaṃ pasīdatīti.*) [§3]

We can paraphrase this question here, or give it alternate translation as follows: “To whom, bhante, should one give gifts?” However clear this may sound in the English idiom, this does not fully reflect the nature of giving that is proper. Obviously, king Pasenadi himself knows that, even though the Buddha and the monastics have been given donations of the 4 supports (food, robes, shelter and medical supplies), they have also received numerous donations of parks and buildings as monastic residences.²

¹ Ce Se so; Be Ee 1:98,19 *issattam* (wr); cf vl Sn 617, also Be *issatta*, but SA 1:166,6 *issatthan’ti*. Here *issattha* is masc n with any of 2 senses: **(1)** (Skt **iṣvatar?* Toev 138, or **iṣu + astr?*) archer; in similes, Miln 250,31, 418,3 f, *~ssa pañham*, title of Miln 414,9-419,15; also *issatthaka*, “archer,” Miln 419,11*. **(2)** (Skt *iṣvatra* or **iṣu + attha*; Amg *īsattha*) archery (as martial skill and profession) *~am bala, viriyañ ca*, S 1:100,8* (Be Ee wr *issattam*); *~an ti usu, sippam*, “*issattha* = art of archery,” SA 1:166,6); *yo... ~am upajīvati*, “who earns a living by archery,” Sn 617 (*āvudha, jīvikam, usuñ ca satthañ cā ti vuttam hoti*, “Said to be a martial professional and the martial art of archery,” SnA 2:466,15) = MA 3:426,2 ad M 98. As stock (list of professions): *...kasiyā...vañijjāya...go, rakkhena...~ena...rāja, porisena... sipp’aññatarena*, “Farming, trading, cattle-herding, archery, the royal service, or some other art,” M 13.8/1:85,33, SD 6.9 (~o [sic] *vuccati āvudham gahetvā upaṭṭhāna, kammam*, “it refers to having taken up a weapon by way of earning a living,” MA 2:56,23 = NmA 2:130,33) = A 4:281,25 (*issāsa, kammena*, “with the work of an archer, AA 4:138,3) ≠ 3:225,1 (*yodhājīva, kammena*, “with the work of a mercenary,” AA 3:308,27). Cf Saddhp 390 (where *~am*, and list abridged); M 3:1,15 (*āvudha, vijjā*, “skill in weaponry,” MA); *~e c’asmi kusalo*, “and I’m skilled in archery,” J 6:77,25* (*dhanu, sippe*, “bowmanship,” 78,1; cf NmA 1:354,12). Also name of sutta, S 3.24/1:98,-19-100,22.

² Eg, **Veḷu, vana** (the bamboo grove, north of Rājagaha) from king Bimbi, sāra (V 1:35-39); **Jīvak’ārāma** (Jīva-ka’s park) or Jīvak’amba, vana (Jīvaka’s mango forest) (east of Rajagaha) from Jīvaka the doctor (D 1:47,1); **Jeta**,

2.2 However, these parks and buildings are all managed by the laity, not by the monastics (including the Buddha), who only reside therein. Neither the Buddha nor the monastics *own* the 4 supports³ or real estates. In short, the Buddha and the monastics own *nothing*. The ancient set of rules, known as the “**lesser moralities**” (*cūla,sīla*), found in the first 13 suttas of the Dīgha Nikāya, all state that monastics should not accept gold and silver (including money), uncooked grain, any kind of humans, farm animals, the larger animals, or land of any kind.

The lesser rules form the first section of triad of ancient monastic codes, with the remaining sections called the “**medium moralities**” (*majjhima,sīla*) and the “**great moralities**” (*mahā,sīla*). The overarching principle behind the rules in these moralities is that monastics should not own, nor have anything to do with money or any money-making activities,⁴ and not indulge in any kind of wrong livelihood (which means anything that distracts them or makes them deviate from a life of renunciation).⁵

Hence, for any monastic to own anything, or even to be attached to something, is simply against the monastic rules and the spirit of renunciation. The idea of monastic ownership of land and property arose only after the Buddha’s time as the monastics become more domesticated, and today many of them own property and use money just like any lay person—which is, of course, way out of line from the monastic spirit of early Buddhism.⁶

2.3 Hence, it makes good sense that the king asks, “**Where, bhante, should one give gifts?**” and not “To whom should one give gifts?” This question (with the “whom”) implies that the gift is to a person or persons. Dharma-wise, it also does not make sense for the Buddha or any monastic to own anything, especially land, property or assets of any kind [2.2].

To this day, worldly monastics continue to accumulate and enjoy tax-free money from donations, rituals, professional positions, and worldly enterprises. Monasteries and temples that belong to the “sangha of the 4 quarters”⁷ are now a rarity, taken over by monastic landlordism. They have effectively become property and assets handed down within monastic clans and extended families, such as the high-caste Siyam Nikaya of Sri Lanka, where the abbacy is as a rule passed down from uncle to nephew.⁸

Understandably, such trends have given the rationale to a growing number of modern monastics for openly calling themselves CEOs (chief executive officers), meaning that they are directly involved with the accumulation of wealth and worldly management.

2.4 WHERE SHOULD WE GIVE?

2.4.1 The Commentary paraphrases “**Where, bhante, should one give gifts?**” [§3] as “One should give to whomever one has faith in.”⁹ This however is an oversimplified gloss, as it clearly refers to giving

vana (Jeta’s grove) or *Anātha,piṇḍikassa ārāma* (Anātha,piṇḍika’s park monastery) (south of Sāvattthī) from Anātha,piṇḍika (Sudatta) (J 1:77-94); **Rājak’ārāma** (near Jeta,vana, SW of Sāvattthī) from Pasenadi (M 3:271; S 5:360; MA 5:96; SA 3:283; J 2:15; DhA 2:52); **Migāra,mātu pāsāda** (Migāra’s mother’s mansion in Pubb’ārāma, east of Sāvattthī) from lady Visākhā (DA 3:859; MA 2:165; SA 1:148; AA 2:124; DhA 1:387-419); SD 14.11 (1); **Amba-pālī,vana** (Amba,pālī’s grove, outside Vesālī, NW of Patna today) from Amba,pālī (D 2:98; cf D:RD 2:102 n1). For the time the Buddha spent at each of such residences, see DhA 1:4. See SD 30.8 (2.2.6.3) & S Dutt, *Buddhist Monks and Monasteries of India*, London, 1962: index sv their Pali names.

³ **False monastics**, it is said, take the country’s alms as “thieves.” Unawakened but **virtuous** monastics use alms as “debtors.” Only the **arhats** are said to use what they receive rightfully as “owners,” in the sense that, on account of their having destroyed any new karma, do not owe anyone anything, as they are fully liberated. (MA 2:305,21; also MA 5:32; SA 2:199)

⁴ **Kasi Bhāra,dvāja S** (S 7.11) records how the brahmin initially refuses to offer any almsfood to the Buddha, but after he instructs him in Dharma, and the inspired brahmin makes his offering, the Buddha says that he cannot accept any offering as “payment” for his teaching (S 7.11 = Sn 1.4), SD 69.6.

⁵ See eg **Sāmañña,phala S** (D 2,43-62), SD 8.10 (3).

⁶ See eg **Money and monastics**, SD 4.19 eg (7.3). On the nature of **pronouns** and how we should properly use them, see **Unanswered questions**, SD 40a.10 (1.4).

⁷ *Cātuddisaṃ saṅghaṃ*, V 1:145, 305, 2:147; D 1:145; A 4:395; DAṬ 1:366.

⁸ RALH Gunawardana 1979:85; Piyasilo 1992a:6-16.

⁹ *Yatthāti yasmim puggale cittam pasīdati, tasmim dātabbam, tassa vā dātabban’ti attho* (SA 1165).

to persons rather than an institution or a trustee board (whose members are usually lay persons), and so leads to problems which we have tried to address [2.1-3].

A rule of thumb for such textual “anomalies”—where the reading seems to be out of the ordinary—we should ask at the start, “Why does this reading seem anomalous? What is it trying to say? What am I missing here?” As a rule, such anomalies may be actually vital pointers to basic or essential Dharma, which we might miss if we react by treating it as a textual error or pan it into some acceptable English idiom. A sutta is always telling us something about the Dharma, and we must be alert to such signs.

2.4.2 Anyway, it is what follows this unhelpful gloss that is of greater significance to the narrative behind the Sutta. It is said that when the Buddha speaks thus, the king took only a single look at the congregation and notices that the sectarians are “standing there at a loss, hanging their heads and scratching the ground with their feet.”¹⁰

Then, he, addressing the congregation, says, “With just this one statement, bhante, the sectarian teachers have been destroyed!”¹¹ Then, the king, to further clarify the matter, asks the Buddha, “Bhante, the mind may have faith in anyone—in the Jains, the naked ascetics, the wanderers and so on—but **where does the giving produce great fruit** [§4].”¹²

2.4.3 It is clear here that the king is alluding to the ancient pre-Buddhist notion (but accepted by the Buddha) that giving has “merit” (*puññā*), that is, good karma, and hence yields “fruit” (*phala*), both mundane and spiritual, commensurate to the moral virtue and purity of the recipients. In other words, we are here dealing with the popular conception of karma.¹³

2.4.4 A brief answer to the king’s question here is given in **the Deva,hita Sutta** (S 7.13).¹⁴

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The Discourse on Archery¹⁵

S 3.24

1 Originating in Sāvathī.

Pasenadi asks about giving

2 Sitting thus at one side, Pasenadi, the rajah of Kosala, said this to the Blessed One:

“Where, bhante, should one give gifts?”¹⁶

3 “Maharajah, wherever the heart has faith.”¹⁷

4 “But where, bhante, does giving have great fruit?”¹⁸

5 “Now, maharajah, ‘Where should one give gifts?’ is one thing, but ‘Where does giving have great fruit?’ is another.”¹⁹

5.2 Maharajah, what is given to the morally virtuous is of great fruit, not what is given to the immoral.

¹⁰ *Te raññā olokita, mattāva mañku, bhūtā adho, mukhā pād’añg’uṭṭhakena bhūmim lekhamānā aṭṭhamsu.*

¹¹ *Rājā “eka, padeneva, bhante, hatā titthiyā’ti mahā, janañ sāvanto mahā, saddena abhāsi.*

¹² *Evañ ca pana bhāsivā, “Bhagavā cittañ nāma nigañṭhā, celaka, paribbājak’ādīsu yattha katthaci pasīdati, kattha pana, bhante, dinnāñ maha-p, phalan’ti pucchi.*

¹³ For details on the karma of giving, see **Dakkhiṇa Vihāṅga S** (M 142), SD 1.9.

¹⁴ S 7.13, 11-14 @ SD 44.16.

¹⁵ On the Pali title, *issattha*, see n at opening header title.

¹⁶ *Kattha nu kho bhante dānañ dātābbañ’ti.*

¹⁷ *Yattha kho mahārāja cittañ pasīdatīti.* On the significance of this statement, see Intro (2.1-3).

¹⁸ See Intro (2.4).

¹⁹ *Aññāñ kho etañ mahā, rāja kattha dānañ dātābbañ, aññāñ pan’etañ kattha dinnāñ maha-p, phalan’ti.*

5.3 Now then, maharajah, here I will ask you in return about just this matter.²⁰ Answer as you see fit.²¹

Parable of the fearful boy

6 What do you think, maharajah? Suppose you were at war here, and you are arrayed for battle.²²

6.2 Then, there comes along a kshatriya boy [a boy of the warrior class],
untrained, unskilled, unpractised, undrilled, [99]
timid, trembling, terrified, ready to flee²³—

would you keep that person?²⁴ Would such a person be any good to you?²⁵

7 “No, bhante, I would not keep that person. Such a person would not be any good to me.”

8 “Then comes along a brahmin boy [a boy of the priest class],
untrained, unskilled, unpractised, undrilled,
timid, trembling, terrified, ready to flee—

would you keep that person? Would such a person be any good to you?”

“No, bhante, I would not keep that person. Such a person would not be any good to me.”

8.2 “Then comes along a vaishya boy [a boy of the merchant class],
untrained, unskilled, unpractised, undrilled,
timid, trembling, terrified, ready to flee—

would you keep that person? Would such a person be any good to you?”

“No, bhante, I would not keep that person. Such a person would not be any good to me.”

8.3 “Then comes along a shudra boy [a boy of the menial class],
untrained, unskilled, unpractised, undrilled,
timid, trembling, terrified, ready to flee—

would you keep that person? Would such a person be any good to you?”

“No, bhante, I would not keep that person. For, such a person would not be any good to me.”

Parable of the brave boy

9 “What do you think, maharajah? Suppose you were at war here, and you are arrayed for battle.

9.2 “Then, there comes along a kshatriya boy [a boy of the warrior class],
trained, skilled, practised, drilled,
fearless, steadfast, brave, not wont to flee²⁶—

would you keep that person?²⁷ Would such a person be any good to you?²⁸

10 “I would keep that person. For, such a person would be useful for me.”

11 “Then comes along a brahmin boy [a boy of the warrior class],
trained, skilled, practised, drilled,

²⁰ *Tena hi mahā,rāja tañ,ñev’ettha paṭipucchissāmi.* This and the next line are stock: **D** 2,34/1:60, 37/1:61, **23**,5/2:-319, 7/2:321, 11/2:327, 15/2:333; **M** 35,12/1:230, **58**,10/1:395, **72**,18/1:487; **S** 3.24/1:98, **42.6**/4:312, **42.7**/4:315, **42.13**/4:341, **44.1**/4:376, 378, **51.15**/5:272; **A** 3.35/1:137, **3.60**/1:168, **3.72**/1:217, **6.48**/3:358, **7.57**/4:79.

²¹ *Yathā te khameyya, tathā naṃ vyākareyyāsi.*

²² *Taṃ kiṃ maññasi mahārāja idha ty-assa yuddham paccupaṭṭhitam saṅgāmo samupabyūḷho* [Be Se so samūpab-būḷho, Ee samupabbuḷho].

²³ *Bhīru chambhī utrāsī palāyī.* Usu more common is the neg phrase, *abhīru anutrāsī apalāyī*, “fearless, steadfast, brave, not wont to flee” [§9.2], Nm 1:171, 2:371, 373, 384; Nc 13; J 4:296, 5:4.

²⁴ *Atha āgaccheyya khattiya,kumāro asikkhito akata,hattho akata,yoggo akatūpāsano bhīru chambhī utrāsī palāyī, bhareyyāsi taṃ purisaṃ.*

²⁵ *Attho ca te tādisena purisenāti.*

²⁶ *Abhīru achambhī anutrāsī apalāyī:* opp of §§6.2, 8, 9.2, 9.3 above. This is stock: Nm 1:171, 2:371, 373, 384; Nc 13; J 4:296, 5:4.

²⁷ *Atha āgaccheyya khattiya,kumāro asikkhito akata,hattho akata,yoggo akatūpāsano bhīru chambhī utrāsī palāyī, bhareyyāsi taṃ purisaṃ.*

²⁸ *Attho ca te tādisena purisenāti.*

*fearless, steadfast, brave, not wont to flee—
would you keep that person? Would such a person be any good to you?”*
“I would keep that person. For, such a person would be useful for me.”

11.2 “Then comes along a vaishya boy [a boy of the merchant class],
trained, skilled, practised, drilled,

*fearless, steadfast, brave, not wont to flee—
would you keep that person? Would such a person be any good to you?”*
“I would keep that person. For, such a person would be useful for me.”

11.3 “Then comes along a shudra boy [a boy of the menial class],
trained, skilled, practised, drilled,

*fearless, steadfast, brave, not wont to flee—
would you keep that person? Would such a person be any good to you?”*

12 “I would keep that person. For, such a person would be useful for me.”

The 5 hindrances have been abandoned

13 “Even so, maharajah, when one has gone forth from home into homelessness, no matter from what family,

and he has abandoned 5 factors and accomplished 5 factors,²⁹

what is given to him is of great fruit.

14 What are the 5 factors that are abandoned?³⁰

(1) Desire for sense-pleasures	has been abandoned.	<i>kāma-c, chando pahīno hoti</i>
(2) Ill will	has been abandoned.	<i>vyāpādo pahīno hoti</i>
(3) Sloth and torpor	have been abandoned.	<i>thinamidham pahīnam hoti</i>
(4) Restlessness and remorse	have been abandoned.	<i>uddhacca, kukkucam pahīnam hoti</i>
(5) Doubt	has been abandoned.	<i>vicikicchā pahīnā hoti</i>

These are the 5 factors that have been abandoned.

The 5 supramundane aggregates of an arhat

15 What are the 5 factors that are accomplished?

- (1) He is accomplished in the group of moral virtue of the non-learner.
- (2) He is accomplished in the group of samadhi of the non-learner.
- (3) He is accomplished in the group of wisdom of the non-learner. [100]
- (4) He is accomplished in the group of liberation of the non-learner.
- (5) He is accomplished in the group of the knowledge and vision of the liberation of the non-learner.

These are the 5 factors he is accomplished in.

16 Thus what is given to those who have abandoned the 5 factors and accomplished 5 factors has great fruit.

Conclusion

17 The Blessed One said this. The well-gone one, having said this, the Teacher further said this:³¹

18 <i>Issattham</i> ³² <i>bala, viriyañ ca</i> ³³ <i>yasmim vijjetha</i> ³⁴ <i>māṇave</i>	An archer, strong and vigorous, a youth who were cultivated as such—
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²⁹ *So ca hoti pañcaṅgavippahīno pañcaṅgasamannāgato.*

³⁰ For detail on the 5 mental hindrances (*pañca nīvaraṇa*), see *Nīvaraṇa*, SD 32.1.

³¹ Be Se adds: *Idam avoca bhagavā. Idam vatvāna sugato athāparam etad avoca satthā.*

³² So Be-Kaṁ Ce Ee Se; Be *issattam* (wr).

³³ So Ce Ee Ke Se; Be *bala, viriyañ ca.*

	<i>tam yuddhattho bhare rājā nāsūram jāti,paccayā</i>	a king at war would keep him— not one a coward on account of birth.	434
19	<i>tath'eva khanti,soraccam dhammā yasmim patiṭṭhitā ariya,vuttim medhāvim hīna,jaccam pi pūjaye</i>	Thus indeed patience and meekness, who is established in such states, noble in conduct, wise, even of low birth, one should honour,	435
20	<i>Kāraye assame ramme vāsayettha bahu-s,sute papañ ca vivane kayirā dugge saṅkamanāni ca</i>	One should build delightful hermitages for the widely learned to live in, And build water-sheds in the arid wilds, and passages through rough terrain.	436
21	<i>Annāṃ pānāṃ khādanīyaṃ vattha,senāsanāni ca dādeyya uju,bhūtesu vipasannena cetasā</i>	Food, drinks, victuals, cloths and lodgings, too, to those who have become upright, one should give with a radiant heart.	437
22	<i>Yathā hi megho thanayaṃ vijju,mālī satakkaku thalaṃ ninnañ ca pūreti abhivassam vasundharam</i>	Just as the thundering clouds, lightning-wreathed, hundred-crested, fill the plains and valleys full, showering heavily upon the earth,	438
23	<i>tath'eva saddho sutavā abhisaṅkhacca bhojanam vanibbake tappayati annapānena paṇḍito āmodamāno pakireti detha dethāti bhāsati</i>	even so, the faithful, the learned, having prepared a meal, satisfies the mendicants who are wise, with food and drinks. Rejoicing, he makes gifts be given, saying, “Give! Give!”	439
24	<i>Tam hi'ssa gajjitam hoti devass'eva pavassato sā puñña,dhārā vipulā dātāram abhivassatīti</i>	For, that's his thunder, just like that of the rains, the floods of merits, in torrents, will shower upon the giver.	440

— evaṃ —

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³⁴ I take *vijjetha* here as *bhaveyya* as at SA 1:66.